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SUBJECT: NEW UN ENVOY TO IRAQ OUTLINES FIRST STEPS

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶1.](#) (C) Summary: On September 26, Ambassador Khalilzad met with Staffan de Mistura, the UN's newly-appointed Special Representative of the Secretary-General (SRSG) for Iraq and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq (UNAMI). The Ambassador underscored strong U.S. support for de Mistura, and encouraged him to turn to USG interlocutors for assistance in implementing UNAMI's new mandate. De Mistura said UN SYG Ban told him the job is the most important UN political post in the world, but agreed to take the position only after it was clear the U.S. strongly supported him. He said the Secretary-General is "totally supportive" of his request to fast-track personnel and other logistical issues. In that regard, he urged the U.S. to focus on the quality rather than the number of personnel he brings with him. De Mistura said he would request the secondment of diplomats from key countries to augment his staff, and asked the U.S. to consider nominating an Arab-speaking individual. To capitalize on the international support for an expanded UN role expressed during the September 22 ministerial, De Mistura said he preferred to defer consultations in Washington and other P5 capitals until after he had established himself in Baghdad and consulted in the region. See Action Request in para 4. End summary.

DE MISTURA ASSURED OF U.S. SUPPORT  
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[¶2.](#) (C) Ambassador Khalilzad began the meeting by congratulating de Mistura on his new role. He urged the UN to undertake a "more engaged" approach in Iraq, in keeping with UNSC Resolution 1770 that expanded the UN's mandate. The U.S. will do its part, said the Ambassador, but we need the UN to become fully involved in encouraging Iraqis towards a national compact and national reconciliation. The Ambassador encouraged de Mistura to consider the many avenues where the UN can be useful, including the regularization and institutionalization of a robust regional dialogue. Citing the President and the Secretary, he underscored U.S. willingness to help de Mistura and the UN however possible, and said that de Mistura could count on U.S. support in Iraq, New York, and elsewhere.

[¶3.](#) (C) De Mistura thanked the Ambassador for U.S. support, and noted that he would not have taken the position if he had not been convinced that the U.S. supported his nomination. The Secretary-General told de Mistura that the UN's role in Iraq is "the most important and delicate political mission that the UN has in the world," and de Mistura was grateful that the UN and the U.S. strongly backed him. Over the next year, "we need to make something positive happen," said de Mistura, and he stressed his commitment to working closely with the U.S. and the Iraqis.

KEY PERSONNEL AND ADMINISTRATIVE ISSUES

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14. (C) De Mistura reported that the Secretary-General would be "totally supportive" of de Mistura's requests to fast-track personnel and logistics issues. The new SRSG told Ambassador Khalilzad that he will handpick quality people to join his team, and said competence would be his primary criterion. He urged that the U.S. "avoid the numbers game" in looking at UNAMI staff in Baghdad, and focus instead on the quality of the people he puts on his team. He was receptive to the message that current UNAMI mission staff have a reputation of pro-Sunni bias that has complicated the UN's engagement with the GOI. De Mistura said a number of countries, including Russia, had already approached the UN to offer their nationals to join the staff. De Mistura supports seconded nationals joining his staff as a means of expanding international support, and urged that the U.S. consider nominating a "good Arabic-speaker." Ambassador Khalilzad said the U.S. would work on this, and suggested that including nationals from Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Iran could help decrease the suspicions of these countries towards UNAMI. ACTION REQUEST: USUN requests State to evaluate the prospect of a U.S. secondee to UNAMI and to identify potential candidates. Ambassador Khalilzad notes a U.S. staff member could improve connectivity and timely exchanges.  
END ACTION REQUEST.

15. (C) The new SRSG raised two other key issues for UNAMI's future. First, he noted that the routine process of planning for the UN's new integrated compound in Baghdad, involving the UN's ACABQ budget advisory committee and the UN General Assembly, would be unacceptably lengthy given the urgent political context. Therefore, he would be recommending several creative approaches to accelerate action, including

USUN NEW Y 00000799 002 OF 002

the use of subcontractors that bypassed the UN's procurement system. He would also recommend supplementing UN funds available for construction by soliciting donations from member states. Ambassador Khalilzad suggested de Mistura also explore the availability of existing property in Baghdad that might be available for the UN's needs.

16. (C) Second, de Mistura raised UNAMI's need for its own plane in order to undertake the internal and regional travel necessary to fulfill his mandate, as well as to illustrate the UN's independence from the coalition. De Mistura underscored that the process for acquiring a civilian plane with appropriate counter-measures was lengthy. Relaying his understanding that counter-measures are required primarily for landing and take-off at BIAP, he proposed that MNF-I assist a UN plane on take-off and landing at BIAP with MNF assets that can provide the required counter-measures. This arrangement would free UNAMI to use a dedicated UN plane for travel and otherwise minimize the UN's reliance on MNF-I. Ambassador Khalilzad suggested de Mistura raise this proposal with the Embassy and MNF-I when he arrived in Baghdad. (Note: UN staff subsequently clarified that this approach may not be feasible or acceptable to the UN's Department of Safety and Security. End Note.)

THE IRAQ COMPACT  
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17. (C) De Mistura raised the Iraq Compact, and said he would like to be useful in assisting the process and coordinating with Ibrahim Gambari. The Ambassador said the Compact was an important tool because it created incentives for Iraqis "to do the right thing." De Mistura agreed, and said it was similar to the carrot of EU membership dangled to the countries from the former Yugoslavia. The Ambassador noted that it is important to show the Iraqis that their behavior has consequences, and that by pursuing national reconciliation and economic reform as described in the Compact, they would receive concrete benefits.

## NEXT STEPS

18. (C) According to Darko Mocibob, the UN's Iraq team leader, de Mistura will spend the month of October closing down his office in Italy and attending to family issues. Outgoing SRSG Ashraf Qazi will leave Baghdad by the second week of October, and de Mistura's first days as new SRSG will be in Istanbul, when he will attend the Iraq Neighbors Conference starting October 31. He will depart Istanbul for Amman, and shortly afterwards arrive in Baghdad. De Mistura expressed willingness to visit Washington as soon as possible, but noted that symbolically it would be important for him to begin work in Baghdad and the region before returning to P5 capitals for consultations.

KHALILZAD